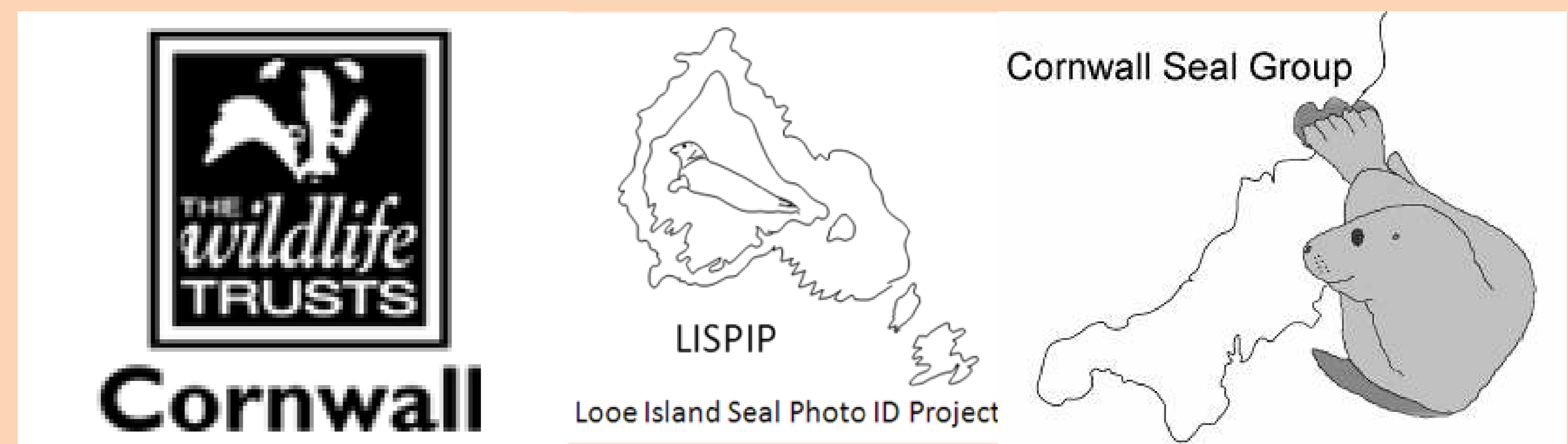




Sue Sayer Rebecca Allen Abby Crosby Kate Hockley Dan Jarvis Derek Spooner

Sue Sayer<sup>1</sup>, Bex Allen<sup>1</sup>, Abby Crosby<sup>2</sup>, Kate Hockley<sup>1</sup>, Dan Jarvis<sup>1</sup>, Derek Spooner<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Cornwall Seal Group, c/o Copperleaf Cottage, Phillack Hill, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 5AD  
<sup>2</sup>Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Five Acres, Allet, Truro, TR4 9DJ  
<sup>3</sup>Senior Fellow, University of Hull, Looe Voluntary Marine Conservation Area volunteer



# A transferable, scalable model of research empowerment - engaging local people in long term, cost-effective, sustainable and systematic research into grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) in Southwest England to inform their conservation.

## Aims and objectives 1: Model

Looe Island Seal Photo Identification Project (LISPIP) is a novel project enabling local people to research pinnipeds in their own area. It involves collaboration between Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT), Cornwall Seal Group (CSG) and Looe Voluntary Marine Conservation Area (VMCA) volunteers. The project aims to enable the local people of Looe to become self sufficient and proficient seal surveyors conducting long term, systematic research of seals in their local area.

### Method 1: Model

Initial interest was generated by a talk organised by Abby Crosby of Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT) and delivered by Sue Sayer of Cornwall Seal Group (CSG) was arranged for Voluntary Marine Conservation Area (VMCA) volunteers. After community consultation coordinated by CWT, an action plan was created to build local capacity. This began with a training session by CSG covering basic survey strategies and key technical information about seals. A pilot survey was arranged by CWT using a boat circumnavigating the island and from this an island-specific protocol was designed to carry out monthly seal surveys around low tide. All these surveys have comprised 'on survey' seal training delivered by participating CSG members.

## Aims and objectives 2: Seals

LISPIP aims to discover the following seal information from Looe Island to inform future conservation decisions:-

- The sites used by seals in the sea and on land and the seasonality of any use
- The number of seals visiting the sites, including information about the seals' ages, sex as well as information about their nutritional and health status
- Links to other seal sites in Cornwall made by individual seals, using photo identification techniques.

### Method 2: Seals

Each month, up to 12 volunteers were ferried over to St George's Island by Tim or Ernie, leaving Looe harbour around 9.00 and returning around 5.00pm, where they were joined by CWT warden Claire. During each survey the following activities were carried out:-

- A planning meeting to organise the day's activities
- A walk around the island to orientate surveyors, identify the 5 survey sites, familiarise new observers with the recording protocol (new surveyors paired with experienced ones) and carry out a bird count
- A 2 1/2 hour survey period within a window of two hours either side of low tide
- A data collection discussion and analysis

## Hypothesis 1: local people can be motivated to engage in long term environmental research : **PROVED!**

Locals have coordinated 19 monthly surveys over 24 months with teams of up to 12 volunteers - 42 different volunteers participated in total, with 29 people doing more than two surveys, eight doing more than nine surveys and more than 11 volunteers actively involved in CSG meetings. After the initial 12 months, the CWT VMCA coordinator was able to stand down, as one of the VMCA volunteers took over the running and organisation of the survey project. Soon after the project started, the CWT island wardens began collecting ad hoc, but more frequent seal data and the most recent project development had been the capture of additional data from island visitors and members of the public, making particularly valuable contributions to the photo identification aspect of the work.

Site number	Date	Time	Start & End	Max Total no. of seals	Including no. of seals	Including no. of seals in the sea	No. of Adults (over 1.6m)	MALE	FEEMALE	NO. of ADULTS (over 1.6m) (Males or Females)	No. of PUPS (around 1m)	NO. of UNKNOWN sex	Including no. of net marked seals (recording code (2-4 digit, 1-4 digit))	Seals disturbed Year No. (code (2-4 digit, 1-4 digit))	Seals moved to sea (code (2-4 digit, 1-4 digit))	No. of seals into sea	Behaviour Code for each seal	Nearest site (L4, 000)	Tide direction (In or Out)	Sea force or condition (Rough, Choppy, Calm)	Weather & wind direction	Wind force or condition (Breeze, Squall, Windy)	Comments	
1	30/05/08	15:03	09:00	29	08/08	26/05/09	26/05/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09	21/08/09

Dame Etna

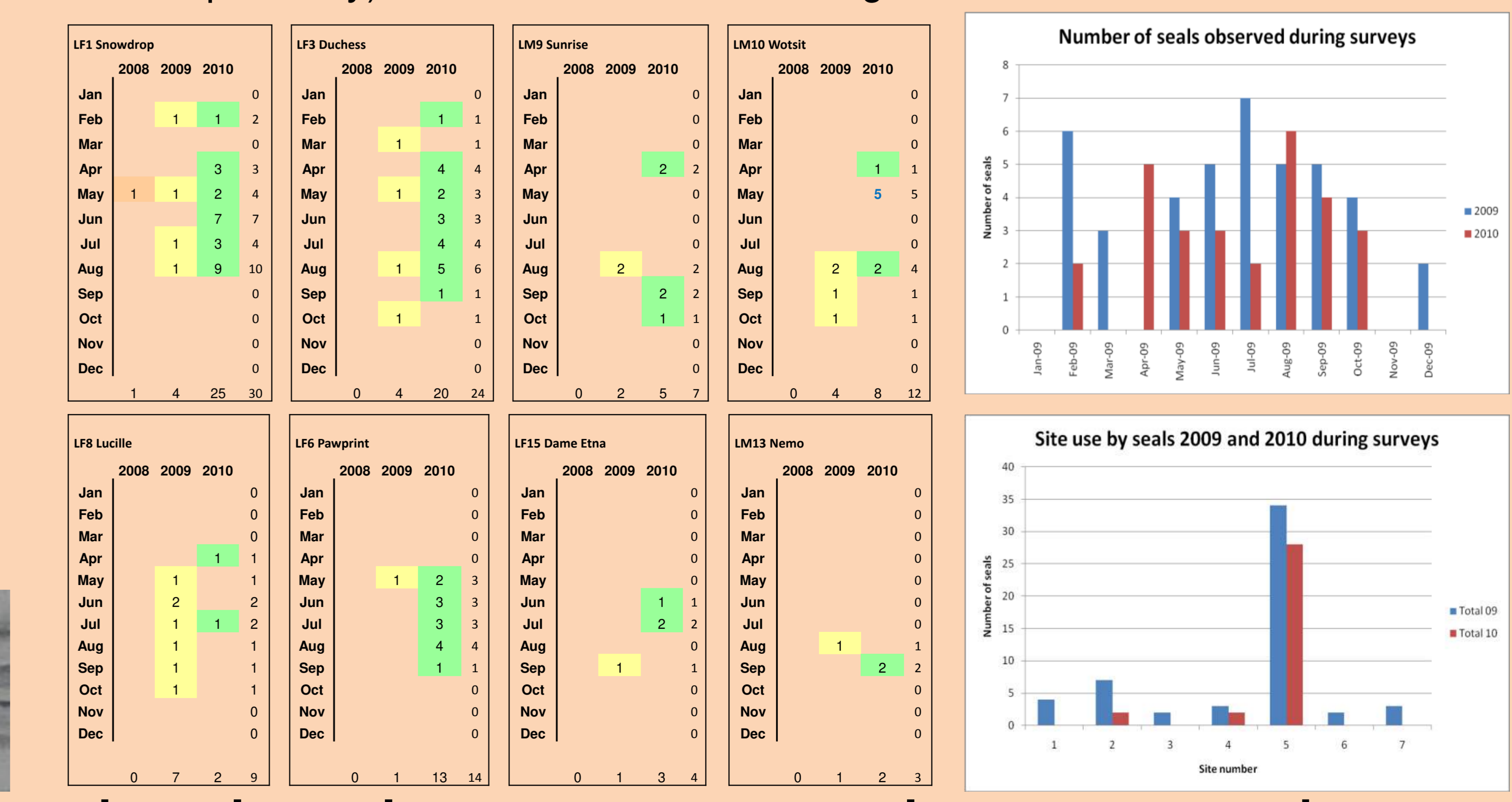
Nemo Cosmo

Elisa, the common Seal

LISPIP Seal Record		Name	Page Number
1	2	3	4

## Hypothesis 2: Looe Island, has a static colony of six grey seals: **DISPROVED!**

30 grey seals were photo identified and at least one common seal. 11 seals were repeat visitors with five seen at least six times (up to a maximum of 30). There were two peaks in the monthly distribution of seals – a secondary spring moulting peak before the main peak during the summer offshore foraging season. There were seasonal differences in the gender composition. A smaller maximum number of seals was observed during surveys in 2010 than 2009 (28 and 41 respectively) and seal habitat use changed between 2009 and 2010.



## Following the success of LISPIP in engaging locals to generate long term data, CWT and CSG are rolling this methodology out to a second Cornish VMCA.

For more information about the work of Cornwall Seal Group, visit [www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk](http://www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) or email [sue@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk](mailto:sue@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk)